

Yr. C, Wednesday 3 in Lent--Worship
March 27, 2019
Preached by the Rev. Furman Buchanan
St. Peter's Episcopal Church
744 Words

Lessons: Zephaniah 3:12-20
Psalm 96:1-9
John 4:19-26

Those who pray—responding intentionally and authentically to the love of God—they will be drawn to worship God with others who feel this same draw. To pray alone—in thought, word, deed, and silence—kindles our desire to join with others in common prayer.

And guess who wrote the book on this? We did! During a time of fear and violence among the 16th century leaders of the nations, the Archbishop of Canterbury presented a brilliant idea—*The Book of Common Prayer*.

“What if we placed the power of community worship in the hands of all people?” he thought. “What if we gave common people the same power that is readily available to the clergy and the monastics?” he wondered.

It is a classically Anglican phenomenon to empower the *full* community to offer thanks and praise to God. It is a classically Anglican phenomenon to empower the entire community to receive the fullness of sacramental grace offered to all of God’s children. It is classically Anglican to recognize that God pours out on *all people* the spirit of grace.

I hope you will notice that word—‘all’—in our prayers and praise this evening. As we sang a moment ago: “All people that on earth do dwell, sing to the Lord with cheerful voice...” We recited in the Psalm, “Sing to the Lord, all the whole earth.” And as we *will* sing before our Great Thanksgiving, “Now thank we all our God, with heart, and hands, and voices...” During our Eucharistic Prayer, we will acknowledge that our Father in heaven has “filled us and all creation with blessing and fed us with constant love” And finally, we will celebrate how Christ’s Blood of the New Covenant is “poured out for you and for all for the forgiveness of sins.”

This classically Anglican Spirit of including and empowering *all people* to fully participate in worship extends back long before the Protestant Reformation. It is conspicuously visible with Jesus. He was martyred by those who wanted to retain full power and control over the common people.

Jesus had a radical vision, inspired by the Law and the prophets of Israel, that God has blessed all people and... God is blessed by the prayers and praise of all people. Jesus *refused* to give up on sinners. And nothing makes a powerful or privileged person quite as angry as when favor is shown to someone *they* deem to be *less worthy*.

And that brings us to the well in Samaria. The Samaritans thought the Judeans were less worthy. (After all, they worshipped God in the wrong place.) And the Judeans thought the Samaritans were less worthy. (After all, they were mixed blood people and enemies of Jerusalem.) The Samaritan woman with all those husbands *knew she* was unworthy, but she had the courage to turn to Jesus. She had a willingness to learn from Jesus. And he taught her all about prayer and worship. He taught her about the way of love!

In the midst of an endless rivalry about unworthiness, Jesus spoke these challenging words of peace. “The hour is coming,” he said, “when you will worship the Father neither on this mountain nor in Jerusalem... true worshippers will worship the Father in spirit and truth... God is *spirit*, and those who worship him must worship in spirit and truth.”

When we gather in community each week to thank, praise, and dwell with God, we are lifting up our hearts to our Source—the One who fills us and all creation with blessing...and who feeds us with constant love. To worship *this kind of God* in spirit and in truth is *possible* because *this God's Messiah* is a historically knowable person named Jesus. And through *his* love he redeemed all people. He *re-valued* all people. He made all people *worthy* to worship the LORD in the beauty of holiness.

As Jesus revealed to the Samaritan woman at the well, he also reveals to us the mysterious ways we are knit into one body—the unworthy ones who know it and the unworthy ones who are in denial. We are all *welcomed* to pray in *his* worthy Name. And we are all welcomed to celebrate his worthy gift—his body, his blood, his life...his love.

This is why...at every Holy Eucharist we break the bread in order to *share* the Body of Christ. We who are many become one body, for we all share in the one bread.

Amen.